

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Teach For America

Application ID: 14AC155946

Program Name: Teach For America - Arkansas

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant strongly documents the teacher staffing issues in Arkansas and presents a compelling case for the need to address the shortage of qualified teachers in the state.

The applicant adequately described the extent and need to improve the educational outcomes of Arkansan students living in poverty. The applicant sufficiently demonstrated the link between poor adult literacy rates, poverty, and high unemployment and low academic attainment for the children that reside in the low income rural communities of Arkansas.

The applicant presents a very compelling case for the need to provide highly qualified teaching staff to underserved rural communities across Arkansas.

The applicant cites a two-year old study and census data that dramatically illustrates the widespread educational deficits across the state that include twenty percent of the population with less than a high school diploma and college graduation rates consistently below the national average.

The applicant also establishes a link between educational deficits and such social issues such as unemployment, persistent poverty, high health care costs, criminal justice involvement, and the state of the economy.

The applicant states that all of its AmeriCorps members are placed in communities throughout the state that have been determined by the Arkansas Department of Education to be either underserved by highly qualified teachers or identified as "subject shortage areas."

The logic model indicates that the 170 AmeriCorps members involved in the proposed project are professional Members, and well prepared to benefit from additional training specific to teaching. The professional development activities that begin prior to placement in a classroom and continues throughout the teaching experience and beyond

is a reasonable alternative approach to preparing the highly qualified teachers for the high-need areas the applicant proposes to serve. These inputs are logically connected to the outputs of the placement and subsequent success of the placed teachers. The outputs can be expected to lead to the short-, medium- and long-term outcomes of knowledge acquisition, student achievement, and the shaping of the career paths of participating teachers, respectively.

The applicant proposes to significantly improve the educational outcomes of more than 16,000 students that reside in the low-income areas throughout the state of Arkansas. Through rigorous selection and training with an emphasis on student achievement, the applicant will place AmeriCorps members who are highly qualified, effective teachers in geographic shortage areas, to teach in subject shortage areas.

The applicant cites several experimental, quasi-experimental, and other studies indicating the effectiveness of the Teach For America program in improving the academic performance of its students.

In addition to raising the educational levels of children, one study revealed that the Teach For America experience has also positively impacted attitudes regarding the value of education, future careers, and racial tolerance.

One of the goals of Teach For America is the encouragement of sustained participation in the field of education, which extends the program's community impact beyond a particular AmeriCorps member's period of service. Teach For America's emphasis on training and ongoing support for its members has resulted in the retention of over forty percent of their alumni in either teaching or leadership roles in the Arkansas school system.

The applicant provides sufficient anecdotal information on the success of their program. Data are provided on the placement of successful teachers in geographic shortage districts.

The applicant notes prior experience as an AmeriCorps grantee, citing significant achievement of middle and high school students taught by an Teach For America AmeriCorps member versus students who were not. In both cases, these students outperformed their peers.

The applicant cited two experimental and three quasi-experimental studies, as well as many other studies that described positive outcomes for various Teach For America projects.

Teach For America was recognized in a 2011 study for the program's positive impact on such social attitudes as beliefs about education, racial tolerance, and future careers.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant documents the shortage of qualified teachers generally and discusses the possible implications of this shortage for students, there is little support provided to document the academic challenges faced by students in the communities where teachers will be placed. Furthermore, minimal specific data are presented on the districts the applicant proposes to serve.

The applicant did not clearly identify the under-served communities in the state of Arkansas targeted for the proposed intervention.

The applicant did not provide adequate comparison data to document the need.

The applicant notes that its targeted population lacks academic opportunities but does not cite specific data to support the short- and long-term effects that it has on the state, to include the cost for health care, criminal justice system and the overall economic health.

Additionally, the applicant did not provide comparison data to support the academic achievement disparity between the low-income students versus their more affluent peers.

The applicant provides no description of the impact that teacher and/or subject shortages has had on the specific communities to be served by this project.

The applicant does not provide any clearly evidence-based data describing measurable outcomes for the Teach For America program. In addition, the applicant provides no information with regard to the impact of Teach for America-Arkansas; therefore, the impact of this program on the specific community addressed by this application has not been clearly established.

The weakness is in the quality of the evidence presented to document successful past performance. The data are not presented as part of a formal study and the applicant does not include details on the sample size, method of data collection, etc.

The applicant provides only information regarding the impact of Teach for America activities, but none specifically for Teach for America-Arkansas. Consequently, they have not demonstrated what impact this program's past performance of the services described in this application had on the specific communities addressed by this application.